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"working to strengthen and revitalize rural communities across America."

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35 RURAL HOUSE MEMBERS CALL FOR REMOVAL OF PROVISION IN FAA REAUTHORIZATION BILL TO IMPOSE NEW FEES ON RURAL AIRPORTS

***Cost-Sharing Provision Threatens Air Service to Rural Communities, was
Inserted into FAA Conference Report Despite Being Defeated in both the
House and Senate***

Washington -- Congressional Rural Caucus Co-Chairs John Peterson (R-PA) and Allen Boyd (D-FL) are leading a group of 35 bipartisan House Members, including Representative Jim Matheson, from rural districts who are urging Members of the FAA Reauthorization conference committee to remove a provision that was inserted into the FAA conference report that could eliminate commercial air service to many rural communities across the country.

The FAA Reauthorization bill was introduced this year with a new 10 percent cost-sharing requirement for cash-strapped rural airports across the country that rely on the Essential Air Service (EAS) program, which was created to ensure that communities with commercial air service before deregulation continue to receive scheduled air service. The new costs would have threatened air service to rural communities in 18 states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Vermont.

During consideration of the bill in May, the House approved by voice vote an amendment offered by Representatives John Peterson, John McHugh (R-NY) and Bill Shuster (R-PA) to remove the new cost-sharing requirement for rural airports. Likewise, a similar local cost share provision was removed from the Senate version of the bill through an amendment offered by Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM).

Despite being defeated in both the House and Senate, the cost-sharing requirement reappeared in the FAA conference report in the form of a pilot program that would initially impose the new fees on 10 rural airports. The FAA Reauthorization bill, officially dubbed the 'Vision 100-Century of Aviation Reauthorization Conference Report,' could be brought to the House floor for a vote within the next week.

In letters sent today to House Transportation Chairman Don Young and Ranking Member James Oberstar, and Senate Transportation Chairman John McCain and Ranking Member Fritz Hollings, the rural House Members urged the conference committee to once again strike the local cost-share provision before bringing the FAA reauthorization bill back to the House and Senate for a vote.

"We write out of grave concern for a provision added to the Vision 100- Century of Aviation Reauthorization Conference Report regarding the adoption of a local cost share for certain Essential Air Service communities," the Members write in the letter. "This addition to the conference report not only goes against the will of both the House and the Senate, but may also have a disastrous effect on many of our small rural airports."

The letter continues, "It is unacceptable to force communities to pay up to \$100,000 in a local cost share, in addition to the many costs they currently incur in running a small local airport. We respectfully request the removal of Section 408 from the Vision 100- Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act Conference Report before it is brought to the House and Senate floors for consideration..."

"Congress cannot cripple rural airports and expect rural economies to thrive. Most small towns look to airports as an economic development driver and they can't afford an additional financial burden as they cope with the down economy and the slump in air travel," said CRC Member Jim Matheson (D-UT).

CRC Co-Chair John Peterson explained that "Rural communities across the country are already facing many difficult challenges, from rising health costs and increasing budget deficits to devastating losses in the manufacturing sector." Peterson continued, "The Venango Regional Airport in northwest Pennsylvania currently lacks the \$5,200 necessary to effectively market their air fares and service, yet they would be required to pay more than \$87,000 per year under this cost-sharing plan. The Bradford Regional Airport in McKean County is facing similar challenges. The last thing Congress should be focusing on is inserting this petty provision into the FAA bill and jeopardizing the transportation needs of rural communities."

"Local governments, especially in rural America have been forced to stretch their budgets to razor-thin levels. If the local cost share is included in the final version of this bill, communities would be faced with \$3 million in extra costs. While \$3 million may not seem much to Washington bureaucrats, I can assure you that small communities will feel the impact," said CRC Member Bill Shuster (R-PA). "Including this provision could mean the difference between a community airport staying open or permanently closing its doors. Essential Air Service plays a vital economic role in small towns and communities, and additional costs imposed by the federal government will result in the loss of jobs and a community's link to our national aviation network."

According to CRC Member Bart Stupak (D-MI), "For 25 years, the EAS program has helped many small communities in my district retain scheduled commercial air service. The unwarranted cost-share proposal would create a new barrier for small communities which desperately need to retain their access to air transportation and the economic development that goes along with it."

"The EAS program is a promise made to states like Wyoming to support air travel in the wake of airline deregulation, and it's a promise Congress needs to keep," said CRC Member Barbara Cubin (R-WY). "Unfortunately, many of our local communities don't have the resources to meet

the local share provision. A town's size shouldn't disqualify it from the opportunity to boost its economy, and air service is essential to get that done."

According to CRC Member Doug Bereuter (R-NE), "I will continue to work actively with Norfolk, Nebraska, officials to attempt to ensure the continuation of EAS support for that community's airport. These small airports are vitally important to the people they serve, and most of them need more assistance, not less."

"EAS is so vital to communities like Boone County, Arkansas because without this program small communities would not be able to afford the high costs of today's air service," said CRC Member John Boozman (R-AR). "If we force a cost-share requirement on the municipalities, air service in many of these small communities will surely disappear."

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